

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

From the Eastern Vascular Society

Vascular surgeons and collaterals: President's Address, Eastern Vascular Society

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Being President of the Eastern Vascular Society is the greatest honor of my professional life. It is with humility and great pleasure that I stand here today to address you. I thank you, members, for electing me president and for bestowing such an honor.

The Eastern Vascular Society, as a regional society, fosters our local culture as vascular surgeons. Here we are not overwhelmed. We do not come here just to learn and teach, and we do not feel distant: we come here to interchange and foster friendship. That is what makes this meeting so good and enjoyable.

The leadership of this society has been wonderful. All the past presidents were leaders and pioneers of vascular surgery. Today, the Eastern Vascular Society is in good standing, and I am sure its future leaders will continue to direct the Society toward an even brighter future. Vascular surgery is at a crossroads today. With increasing demand, decreasing manpower, and encroachment by other disciplines, we have to make vascular surgery appealing to future generations of trainees and make it competitive. We may have to deviate from our traditional approach of teaching and training vascular surgeons to a system that understands and accepts their terms. For instance, more than half of medical students are female. We shall have to embrace everyone's special needs and interests. I strongly believe that we can make the profession of vascular surgery both noble and enjoyable. With some adaptations, I see a bright future for vascular surgery. We should accept the challenge and forge ahead. I wish the Society and its membership all the best and believe that it will be iconic to future vascular surgeons.

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Competition of interest: none.

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PROLOGUE

This is the story of Joe, a vascular surgeon. Joe grew up in the Midwest and became a general surgeon because of family pressure (his father was a general surgeon). Joe chose vascular surgery under pressure from his mentors and became a prominent and successful vascular surgeon. He was among the best clinical surgeons, researchers, and educators and was well published. He also presided over some of the most prestigious vascular societies. Throughout his career, Joe devoted his entire life to vascular surgery.

Joe is now approximately 70 years old. Over the last few years, he has been thinking about retiring and enjoying life, which he has always wanted to do, but he now finds himself unable to. First, Joe does not have sufficient funds to retire, which he blames on a wide range of causes—such as the falling of the stock market, his partners deceiving him, and paying alimony to his ex-wife—but not on himself. He built a wonderful career for himself but did not create leadership to follow him, so he is afraid that when he retires, the vascular service will fail. Throughout his life, Joe complained about work: he hated working so much and was looking forward to someday retiring and enjoying life.

If you ask him, however, he says that he is not retiring because he still loves vascular surgery, but vascular surgery has changed from the traditional cutting surgery and is not what it used to be. He did not adapt to it, so Joe is not busy and not needed. He has not been well liked because he has never cared about the so-called ordinary people (his partners or trainees). Few people speak to him at work, and Joe is no longer married because his wife felt uninvolved in his life and never saw him. He does not have a loving family to go back to; even his children keep their distance. They rarely saw their father while growing up, and they would never choose medicine as a career after hearing their father complain about the hours he spent working. Most people try to avoid him, including his many past friends. Now when Joe goes to the national conferences, his colleagues avoid him also. These are the same people he ignored when he was at the helm. He feels like a retired ball player going to the clubhouse. He sees his name on the wall, but no one cares because he did not treat them well during his heyday. Once a pioneer vascular surgeon, a potential role model for

many, and the envy of his peers, Joe is now lost as a retiring vascular surgeon.

MAKING OF A VASCULAR SURGEON

Joe did not make a mistake in becoming a vascular surgeon. Vascular surgery is still one of the best specialties there is. He did not have to change his career; all he had to do was to tweak it a little bit. He did not have to sacrifice his life for vascular surgery; rather, he should have used vascular surgery to support his life. Now, imagine if Joe's life was something like this . . .

Family. At work, he makes and accepts calls from his wife and his children, taking the time to listen to the simple but important things such as what happened at his wife's doctor's appointment or his daughter asking for help with algebra. His office staff knows that when his wife or children call, it is a priority and to try to get a hold of him and not just take a message. He makes time to go to their school functions, plays, and sporting events.

The amount of time spent at work is not a factor keeping Joe from his family. It is the time spent outside of work that matters. Instead of spending time at drug or company dinners or at the bar after work, he goes home and takes care of his children and has dinner with his family. He tries to include his family in all occasions. He belongs to a golf club, which has family activities, a pool, picnic area, and so on, where family and friends can participate. He chooses family-oriented vacations. He throws parties at his house and invites his colleagues, nurses, office staff, and their families so that everyone can get to know one another. There is rarely a business function in which the family cannot be included. Business meetings do not have to be at 6:30 in the morning. This takes precious time away from the family as the kids are waking up and getting ready for school. Joe realizes that we go to training school to learn how to raise puppies, but we spend little time to educate ourselves on how to raise our children or on having good relationships with our spouses. We seem to do it by watching others or by trial and error and hope it comes out okay.

The most important thing is to spend quality time with them. When a bypass fails, we can do another to attempt to salvage the limb, but we have only one opportunity to raise our children. We cannot go back and do it over if we did not have a successful outcome the first time around. Time is short, and Joe spends more time with family to compensate. Likewise, a modern vascular surgeon should be able to do the same amount of work in less time. Joe includes his family in his professional life. It is important to share with the family an interesting case or remarkable happening of that day, even if it was an especially bad day at work; the family is there to help and support. Even a half-hour of quality time playing with the kids would mean the world to them. They should not always hear "not now, I'm too tired." Joe does not hang around the office to prove to his family that he works hard. They will appreciate the time spent at home much more. Joe does not spend his money frivolously. He gift-funds his children's education and be-

yond so that they will start their lives with a small amount of capital without the burden of debt.

Staff. In his new life, Joe does not consider the staff in his office just ordinary people. He realizes how much they do to make his life easier. He truly cares about them and their families. He goes around to say hello and asks about their days and their families. He also tries to enhance their careers. Because they are part of his establishment, they should also participate in continuing education opportunities and work on advancing their knowledge. He recognizes their contributions and congratulates them for their accomplishments. He includes them in outings, picnics, and holiday parties. They enjoy an on-campus daycare center and a generous profit-sharing plan. He sees that employees are happy and work in a stress-free environment.

Trainees. Joe is an educator, and he cares about students, residents, and fellows. He invests his time in training them properly not only in medicine, but also in how to be busy professionals and make time to enjoy life simultaneously. He tries to help them achieve a family-oriented lifestyle. He counsels them that vascular surgery is a profession to support one's life and not vice versa. With better technology and better training, they should be able to do things more quickly and efficiently. This frees up time to do other things in life. These technically savvy surgeons should learn every aspect of vascular surgery, including interventional radiology, vascular laboratory technology, dialysis access surgery, vein surgery, wound care, foot care, and physical therapy and rehabilitation. In addition, they need to learn about the business aspects of vascular surgery. Wasting an enormous amount of time in the operating room is not economically feasible in today's world. They should be able to perform the same amount of work in less time and achieve the same goal. They should work in groups in a business-type setup. Team work will allow for optimal flexibility of time in their professional and personal lives. The thought that medicine is service oriented and that money is not important may no longer be true. Medicine is a business and a service, and education and research accompany it. All of the partners in a business should be treated similarly. They each should look out for everyone's financial needs, career goals, and even family life. In doing so, they may become more successful and better vascular surgeons and in turn attract more people to the profession. Joe teaches them to be successful and happy.

Business and economics. Joe does not consider himself the best vascular surgeon who no longer has to change anything. Vascular surgery has changed. Today's vascular surgeons should be able to provide care in all areas of vascular disease, including surgical, medical, interventional, and preventative medicine. They should be involved in the entire spectrum. They need to be business oriented and knowledgeable about the billing, coding, denials, and collections areas of their practices. They may need to be on the boards of managed care insurance companies and get involved in basic business practices. They should also learn to participate in capital investments, computed tomographic

scanning, and magnetic resonance angiography, in addition to the vascular laboratories and angiography suites.

In the future, they should even get involved with vascular hospitals that are co-owned by vascular surgeons; who knows the business of vascular medicine better than a vascular surgeon? Vascular surgeons need to reach out to the community and make vascular centers readily accessible. Joe embraces other disciplines that are getting more involved in the business of vascular disease. Dealing with other disciplines is inclusive—not exclusive. Joe learned how to swim with the sharks without being eaten. He does capital investments and other business ventures with cardiologists, interventional radiologists, hospitals, and other health care establishments and professions. It is important to take care of all business aspects. There should be non-profit vascular foundations for research, education, and training, and we should be involved in fund raising and professional public relations and publicity, but not arrogant advertisements.

Joe has seen many specialties shrink or disappear because the business aspect of medicine was not addressed; they failed to diversify their trades. Revenue should come from vascular surgery, as well as the other entities previously mentioned. An ideal business should provide good quality service to patients along with quality research, education, and training, all the while providing a decent quality of life for its employees.

Here is a model of what a modern vascular surgery practice may look like. Today, a vascular surgeon should perform about 300 cases per year, which translates to 10 cases per week. With efficient time management, they could spend about 20 hours weekly doing 10 cases, 8 hours a week for outpatient clinics, 4 hours for administration, and 4 hours for teaching and research. This should allow for

plenty of time to finish work without having to work more than 40 hours a week. Because Joe is putting in almost 10 to 12 hours a day, he may be able to complete all his work and still have 3 days off a week to spend with his family. Three hundred cases per year should bring in revenue of approximately \$600,000; an additional third may be added to that from vascular laboratory revenues and another third from capital investments and hospital directorship. This should allow a comfortable yearly income beyond overhead costs. Joe invests the maximum allowable percentage of his income in retirement funds so as not to have to worry about a financial burden at retirement. Joe reaches out to the younger generation of men and women on their terms to create an ambiance in vascular surgery to help build strong vascular surgeons, strong families, and strong communities.

EPILOGUE

Let us look at Joe, the new improved vascular surgeon. He has an admirable career, a great family life, and a good retirement fund that will allow him to retire comfortably. He serves on several boards, is well liked by his colleagues, and has many friends. He can also, after retirement, enjoy a happy life with his wife, children, and grandchildren. His students, colleagues, and staff all see him as a role model. He is guiding people to run the business so well that it will not falter after his retirement. As a matter of fact, the future will be better and brighter with continued strong leadership. Because of the creation of a diversified center, the profession of vascular surgery has been enhanced. His center attracts bright young trainees who continue to uphold the theme that vascular surgery is a great profession that can also offer a great life that need not be sacrificed.

Finally, Joe retired and lived happily ever after.